

June 30, 2014

I am writing in accordance with the Sunset Advisory Commission opening of a public comment period to address the Sunset Commission Report: Department of Aging and Disability (DADS). Thank you for the opportunity.

As a mom of two daughters - one who lives life with a disability - and a disability rights advocate I have been employed by or served as a volunteer for a variety of agencies benefiting individuals with disabilities and their family. I have also served on committees organized around disability issues. Please note that the testimony provided here are my personal perspectives and the perspectives of family and friends who have asked that their names be added below in support of this testimony.

I support the following recommendations addressed in ISSUE 1: Despite Declining Enrollment, Skyrocketing Costs, and Questionable Quality of Care, Texas Continues to Operate 13 SSLCs.

- Require DADS to close the Austin SSLC by August 31, 2017.
- Establish the State Supported Living Center Closure Commission to evaluate the SSLCs and determine an additional five centers to close.
- Require DADS to close the five SSLCs determined by the SSLC Closure Commission no later than August 31, 2022.

Many U.S. citizens with disabilities rely on Medicaid long-term supports and services (LTSS) to live a meaningful life in the community; this need is no different in Texas. The difference here is that historically the Texas Legislature has relied heavily on the costly institution-based model of care and has adopted a budget to preserve it; a decision that limits access to cost effective community-based LTSS for persons with disabilities who choose to live in the community.

This decision has also set up a LTSS system of support that thrives on crisis control and often destroys family dynamics. There are times when families of young children, youth or adults with a disability find themselves in crisis before they are offered community-based services. This offer of support often comes too late. Families have exhausted all efforts – they often express feelings of helplessness and chronic fatigue and stress. Some have lost their job, relationships have been destroyed and financial resources have been depleted.

The DADS mission ***is to provide a comprehensive array of aging and disability services, supports, and opportunities that are easily accessed in local communities.*** The current structure deviates from this mission. While an array of services is offered many are not accessible.

If Texas is going to improve outcomes for its citizens with disabilities, ***including individuals who choose to live in the community,*** the Texas Legislature MUST consider and take necessary steps

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to implement the recommendations above and reinvest any savings to reduce the waiting list for community-based LTSS.

Individuals and families, who choose institution-based care, should be allowed to remain in that setting, even though it may be at a different SSLC.

If an SSLC is scheduled for closure, a moratorium on admissions should be implemented.

In closing it is my hope and prayer that the Sunset Advisory Commission will consider my testimony with the weight I believe it deserves given my personal experiences and advocacy work - directly with families on an almost daily basis for the past 18 years.

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I certify that I have read this testimony to the following individuals listed below and received their endorsement.

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